

IN BRIEF



Neymar donates \$1 million
RIO DE JANEIRO
Paris Saint-Germain forward Neymar has donated \$1 million to help combat the coronavirus outbreak in his native Brazil. The funds have been divided between UNICEF and a charity campaign launched by TV presenter Luciano Huck. Former Barcelona and Spain star Xavi Hernandez and his wife have donated \$1.08 million to the Hospital Clinic in Barcelona. IANS

UEFA lifts TV blackout for England, Scotland

LONDON
UEFA has lifted a ban on the live screening of Premier League games kicking off at 3 p.m. in England and Scotland for the rest of the season. The blackout has long been in place to protect attendance at matches. The move by European football's governing body is seen as a step towards restarting some domestic competitions in Britain behind closed doors in order to complete the season, interrupted by the coronavirus crisis. AFP



Rohit, Warner best T20 openers: Moody
NEW DELHI
Tom Moody on Saturday picked India's Rohit Sharma, in pic., and fellow-Australian David Warner as the best opening batsmen in T20 cricket. In a question-answer session on Twitter, Moody also picked Chennai Super Kings as his favourite IPL team and M.S. Dhoni as favourite captain. Moody said Shubman Gill "stands out" among emerging players. PTI

Serie A says no date set for return to action

MILAN
Serie A bosses said on Friday that doubts remain over when football can return to Italy — all sport in Italy is suspended until at least April 13. A meeting between top-flight Serie A and representatives of the Italian players' union (AIC) took place by video conference to discuss a date for a return to action and potential player salary cuts. No decision was taken on both. AFP

Kobe Bryant heads 2020 Hall of Fame list

LOS ANGELES
Five-time NBA champion Kobe Bryant, who died in a helicopter crash in January, headed a star-studded list of players named in basketball's 2020 Hall of Fame on Saturday. He was among the nine who will be enshrined at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame on August 29. AFP

FIFA puts off women's U-17 WC

India has to wait to host the showpiece event until new dates are decided

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The FIFA Under-17 Women's World Cup to be held in India in November was on Saturday postponed by football's governing body due to the worsening COVID-19 pandemic.

The women's age-group showpiece was to be held at five venues in the country — Kolkata, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Ahmedabad and Navi Mumbai — from November 2-21. It was to be India's maiden appearance in the U-17 World Cup.

U-20 WC postponed

The decision was taken by the FIFA-Confederations working group which was recently established by the Bureau of the FIFA Council to address the consequences of the pandemic.

The working group also recommended postponement of the FIFA Under-20 Women's World Cup Panama/Costa Rica 2020 — originally scheduled for August/September 2020.

Meanwhile, the All India



Welcome deferred: India had been looking forward to playing the perfect host to the Under-17 Women's World Cup. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

Football Federation (AIFF) said the postponement was on expected lines.

"Just like other sports events which were postponed due to this dreaded disease, it (postponement of U-17 World Cup) was to happen," said AIFF general secretary Kushal Das.

The qualifying events in Europe and Africa and other confederations are yet to be held and so the decision was on expected lines.

He said the tournament would most likely be held next year.

- The event was to be held at Kolkata, Guwahati, Bhubaneswar, Ahmedabad and Navi Mumbai
- Qualifying events in Europe, Africa yet to be conducted

LTA pledges support to revive the sport

TENNIS

KAMESH SRINIVASAN
NEW DELHI

The cancellation of Wimbledon this year due to the coronavirus pandemic has dealt a serious blow to the tennis fraternity.

The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), which governs the game in Britain, however, has swung into action and pledged around £20 million to tennis venues, coaches, officials and players in order to ensure a healthy revival of the sport in England, Scotland and Wales.

The measure is aimed at protecting the grassroots of the sport even as it aspires to support the professional players and coaches, including providing financial grants to the lower-ranked players.

To ensure viability

"Our primary objective in announcing these unprecedented measures is to ensure clubs and venues remain viable, and coaches and officials are not lost," said LTA chief executive Scott Lloyd in a statement.

Most significantly, ATP/WTA ranked players in the 101-750 bracket in singles and 101-250 in doubles will get appropriate grants. There will also be increased prize money and tournament bonuses when the events are revived.

The financial commitment includes repayment holiday of up to six months for all existing LTA facility



Scott Lloyd. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

loans to the tune of £1 million in all. An equal amount will reach the tennis fraternity through the refund of registration fee for venues for 2019-20.

Hardship fund

A hardship fund of about £13.5 million has been kept to provide interest-free loans of up to £5,000 for those in need. Around £4 million would be provided as financial grant for the LTA-accredited coaches and tutors, apart from a separate fund of around £1 million for interest-free loans for coaches up to £5,000.

There will also be support for tournaments cancelled where the players' entry fee may have been reimbursed.

In return for the support, the LTA would ask the players and coaches concerned to commit their time to help open up tennis to more people in their area when play resumes.

The Indian Tennis Association and sports administrators should start looking at ways to do their bit, taking inspiration from LTA.

Training Dutee a new challenge now, says coach Ramesh

'Plan is to make her compete in both 200m and 100m'

V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM
HYDERABAD

For N. Ramesh, the SAI athletics coach who gave a new direction to sprinter Dutee Chand's career by supporting her when she was facing the IAAF ban on grounds of hyperandrogenism a few years ago, it is a new challenge to train her for the postponed Tokyo Olympic Games.

"In a way, the rescheduling of the Games is a blessing in disguise for most of the contenders, except, maybe, for those who are ageing.

"In Dutee's case, we are already into the preparatory mode," the 55-year-old Ramesh told *The Hindu*.

"The plan is to make Dutee compete in both 200m and 100m events in the run-up to the Games, but the focus will be on 100m as research, and her own inclination, suggests the shorter sprint is more suited to her," he said.

Early start

"It is not just Dutee alone, who is being trained via mobile app.

"The day starts at 4.30 a.m. for all the athletes scattered across Telangana and Andhra Pradesh," he said.

"I first suggest to them to do some visualisation on the day's training session before the start, for this has been proven scientifically to have



Silver lining: Ramesh feels the Tokyo Games postponement is a blessing in disguise for many, including Dutee.

The focus will be on 100m as research, and her own inclination, suggest the shorter sprint is more suited to her

a better effect," he said. How is the review done? "For example, Dutee will give me the video feedback of her set of 30m sprints with timings and, based on that, corrective measures will be suggested. Similarly, all the athletes have their own specific training modules.

Tokyo Olympics: SAI to reassess preparations

GENERAL

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The postponement of the Tokyo Olympics has forced the Sports Authority of India (SAI) to re-evaluate preparations for the same.

On Saturday, it began the process, with SAI DG Sandip Pradhan holding a video conference with Hockey India officials, including CEO Elena Norman and High Performance Director David John. The men's and women's chief coaches were also present.

Various modalities including teams' training and domestic and foreign competitions were discussed with the coaches expressing satisfaction at the measures currently in place at the SAI Centre in Bengaluru.

"We had a positive discussion about the state of affairs and indicated our preferences once the situation improves and as soon as more is known about the possibilities in the future," women's chief coach Sjoerd Marijne said.



Sandip Pradhan. ■ FILE PHOTO

"We had a very productive meeting, discussed the planning process for the next 16 months and await decisions as to when we can re-start full training," men's coach Graham Reid added.

HI gives ₹75 lakh more
Hockey India, meanwhile, added another ₹75 lakh to take its contribution to the PM-CARES fund to ₹1 crore to counter the spread of COVID-19.

The federation had earlier committed ₹25 lakh before its Executive Board decided to up the amount on Saturday.

England cricketers' noble gesture

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LONDON

England cricketers, both men and women, have volunteered pay-cuts and donated £500,000 as contribution towards the fight against COVID-19.

The gesture comes after the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had proposed a 20% cut in players' salaries. "The donation of £500,000 is equivalent to a 20% reduction in the men's salaries while the women volunteered for a cut in April, May, June salaries.

"Following a meeting of all of the England men's centrally contracted cricketers, the players have agreed to make an initial donation of 0.5m to the ECB and to selected good causes," read a statement from the players. "This contribution is the equivalent of all of England's centrally contracted players taking a 20% reduction in their monthly retainers for the next three months," the statement said.

These are not normal times, says Narain

'This is the first time in 27 years I am spending more time with family'

RAYAN ROZARIO
COIMBATORE

For Narain Karthikeyan, the 'fastest Indian in the world', life has come to a screeching halt due to COVID-19. The former F1 driver agrees that he has lived his life in the fast lane all these years and a sudden stop like this is a bit unusual.

"This is the first time in the last 27 years that I am spending more time with my family. I do not know whether it is a nice thing to happen when the world is struggling because of the virus," Narain told *The Hindu* here on Saturday.

"These are not normal times... in fact, they are the most difficult and make you realise that the world can change overnight — from a bright scenario to a bleak one."

He revealed that things were moving at snail's pace for him. "I need to get the day going, and plan it accordingly."

Hard at work

The 43-year-old racer, whom young drivers look up to for inspiration, is working hard to keep himself fit for future events.

After spending some time in Japan, where he drove in the SuperGT series for Nakajima Racing and finished with a win under testing conditions in the final race of the season, Narain has set



Narain Karthikeyan. ■ FILE PHOTO

his sights on the European LeMans racing endurance series. "I doubt if anything will happen this year because the situation is so bad," he said.

Will it be difficult for drivers to come back with a bang after a break like this? "It will be slightly difficult but you will have to go with the flow," said Narain.

Battle-ready

"I compete with world-class drivers half my age and I feel I have enough speed in me to beat them on a regular basis. I also keep myself fit all the time," added Narain who, along with the other drivers in the Race Legends group, has planned to chip in for those affected by the pandemic.

Narain said he has never seen anything like this in his life.

"I wish and pray this never happens again."

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

1	7	8	2	4	3	9	5	6
2	4	3	9	5	6	1	8	7
6	9	5	8	7	1	2	4	3
5	2	7	4	9	8	6	3	1
3	6	4	7	1	2	8	9	5
8	1	9	3	6	5	7	2	4
9	3	1	6	8	4	5	7	2
7	5	2	1	3	9	4	6	8
4	8	6	5	2	7	3	1	9

IPL should happen, says Pietersen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The COVID-19 pandemic may have indefinitely stalled all sporting activity, but former England captain Kevin Pietersen "truly believes" that the 13th edition of the IPL should happen the moment there is a window of opportunity.

He proposed a "condensed" league behind closed doors, adding the fans shouldn't be risked.

"Let's say July/August at the earliest... I do truly believe the IPL should happen. I do believe it is the kick-start to the cricket season. I think every single player around the world is desperate to play in the IPL," Pietersen said.

The former star batsman expressed his thoughts on Star Sports' show *Cricket Connected*.

"There could be a way in which to get some money into the franchises, into the economy by having a



Batting for it: Pietersen believes every player around the world is desperate to play in the IPL. ■ GETTY IMAGES

situation where you use maybe three venues which are completely closed to fans and the players can still go out and play the tournament in three or four weeks.

Condensed version

"So, it's a more condensed tournament in three venues which we know are safe, which we know are secure," he said.

Agreeing with Pietersen,

former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar spoke of the importance of organising the IPL. "When you talk about the IPL, it's not just about the Mumbai Indians, or a Dhoni or a Virat Kohli, there are a lot of people who are making their livelihood through the IPL," he said.

The IPL was slated to begin on March 29, but has been deferred until April 15.

Will not let anyone down: IOA

Have to be optimistic to get out of this situation, says Batra

VIJAY LOKAPALLY
NEW DELHI

Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president Narinder Batra, on Saturday, assured the sporting fraternity of all help during the ongoing phase of lockdown.

"These are challenging times for sports. Everything will have to be restructured (when things become normal)," Batra said.

Identifying talent

"We are in touch with all the (national) federations but it is just that you are planning based on assumptions that things get all right by July-August. How to build up. When to peak? It is basically focusing on the Olympics. And, in the longer run, identify the younger lot which is going to be our potential in 2024 Olympics also."

On the role of the administrators, Batra informed, "We have been in touch with all the federations and all athletes through their (respective) federations. We are



Narinder Batra. ■ FILE PHOTO: PTI

trying to make sure that everyone is doing well. The athletes and their families are in good state. The local administration, State government, Sports Authority of India are involved fully. Everyone is trying to make sure that things remain in good condition."

Be free of stress

On the assurance to athletes, Batra said, "I can assure them that things will be as per their requirements whe-

never it becomes normal. Whatever they want will be met with. There will be fear until the vaccine comes out (for COVID-19). I agree there will be problems. We have to be optimistic to get out of the current situation. You have to be mentally free of all the stress, because it can affect the performances."

Batra emphasised the athletes need not worry on the financial front. "Most federations in India would only be making a statement if they try to give assurances and not delivering at a later date. All our athletes are employed by the government or private organisations, so no salary cuts have been done. That's one good assurance.

"Right now, we are engaged in giving contributions to the Prime Minister's CARES Fund which can help the society in general. If a situation comes where an athlete or group of athletes need help, rest assured we won't let anyone down."